



NEWSLETTER: September 2024

Koala Habitat Planting Day July 6, 2024

Last year, for our annual working bee, we joined Mornington Peninsula Koala Conservation Group to plant koala habitat plants. We found the project, the group, and the brilliant organisation so inspiring we joined them again this year. This time we were working on a private property in Tuerong. The aim was to get 1500 plants into the ground over the weekend; there were 30 volunteers there on Saturday, and by lunchtime when we finished most of the plants were in the ground, or ready to go in the next day. Standing back to admire everyone's handiwork at the end was quite inspiring- a sea of plants.

MPKC are aiming to plant 26,000 plants this year, between May and September, from Flinders to Pearcedale and everywhere in between. They have planted 70,000 trees and habitat plants in the past 3 years, creating wildlife corridors by connecting existing koala habitat and food trees on the Mornington Peninsula. The aim is to encourage koalas away from urban areas where they are often killed by vehicles and dogs, and give them better habitat.

Mornington Peninsula Koala Conservation Group has a very informative and inspiring website, mpkoalas.org.au, a Face book page- Mornington Peninsula Koala Conservation, and can be contacted on mpkoalatree-planting@outlook.com.

We had our lunch at the picnic ground



at Devilbend NFR close by, then went for a walk to see what we could see. The birds on the reservoir were nearly all coots, with a few swans and cormorants. We reflected mournfully on years ago when we would see Great Crested Grebes and Blue-billed Ducks. We got to a total of 20 birds, with nothing special seen. The wind chill made going home very attractive.

Text & Photos: J Smart

Footnote: MPKCG have achieved their aim of 25,000 plus plants in the ground this year.

Blown Away! - Or: Flame Robins Galore!

Birding at Banyan Wetland, 2nd September 2024

Our scheduled birding outing to Banyan Wetland proved to have little appeal, with only two members fronting up. Those potential attendees who were not elsewhere in the country seemed to have been put off by the gale-force winds that had been lashing the state for the past week. Only Velimir and I were sufficiently dedicated (that's our word for it anyway) to go ahead. Unfortunately, observing the wetland meant looking straight into the wind; the windspeed matched 7 on the Beaufort Scale 'inconvenience felt when walking against wind', otherwise called a Near Gale, or about 60 kilometres per hour, with gusts to force 8 'progress generally impeded', a full Gale. This made bird observing somewhat difficult—between being buffeted by the wind and wiping the tears from our eyes, we were only able to spot some Masked Lapwings, Magpies, Magpie-larks and a Willie Wagtail, but nothing else. We quickly decided that conditions were less than ideal.

All was not lost, however.

Seeing that looking into the wind towards the wetland was impractical, we instead turned out attention to the paddocks across the road. With our backs to the wind, and under the partial shelter of the roadside hedgerow, we were rewarded with an abundance of birds. Flame Robins—at least five females, three, possibly four males—were extremely active hopping between the open close-cropped pasture and the thick African Box-thorn bushes. Keeping company with them was a party of Superb Fairy-wrens, and flocks of Red-browed Finches and European Goldfinches. Grey Fantail and more Magpies and Magpie-larks were keeping close to the ground; Little Ravens, however, persisted in climbing into the sky where they mostly flew sideways.



Further down the road a Great Egret kept sensibly in the shelter of the rushes, while a pair of White-faced Herons seemed to be trying to get to the wetland but making no progress into the wind, landing where they started from. Swooping low over the paddocks were numerous Fairy Martins and Welcome Swallows. Red Wattle-birds and Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes clung tenaciously to the swaying branches.

We then decided to use the car as a mobile bird hide, enabling us to see a few more birds on the wetland—a large group of Swans on the far side, another Great Egret, and a scattering of Silver Gulls. Half a dozen Terns (Whiskered?) patrolled the air just above the water, and a Swamp Harrier cruised across. A pair of Australian Kestrels just about closed out the observations; our last observation for the day came later that evening when on reviewing the photographs I'd taken of the wetland I was surprised to see a pair of Shovellers in the foreground of one of them, becoming the only duck on our list of 27. Not the greatest birding day, but not the worst.

Text & Photos: Lee Denis



Red Hill Rail Trail & Endeavour Fern Gully

17 August 2024

This excursion combined two walks in Red Hill, starting with the Rail Trail. This popular walking track follows the route of the long-defunct Bittern to Red Hill rail line. The rail line was built in 1920-21, using ballast from the Moorooduc Quarry; it was 16 kilometres long and the journey took '1.5 hours uphill and 50 minutes downhill'. The line was closed in 1953 and the track dismantled two years later. A reconstruction of the platform and station house, together with signage and commemorative plaques, sits at the start of the walk.

This is not particularly a field naturalist walk, being a wide track shared with dogs, horses and bicycles, running in a corridor of Sweet Pittosporum and Karamu, along with numerous other exotic species like Forget-me-not, Violets and Oxalis. However, if we turned off our critical faculties for a while it was quite a pleasant walk, with a reward of good views over Western Port, and, as it turned out, a very acceptable bird list. The 29 species recorded included Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, King Parrot and both Crimson and Eastern Rosellas; Golden Whistler and Kookaburra. Small bush birds included Superb Fairy-wren, Spotted Pardalote, Brown and Striated Thornbill, Yellow Robin, White-browed Scrubwren and a number of honeyeaters—White-eared, Yellow-faced, Eastern Spinebill and Red Wattlebird. Bell Miners were conspicuous by their calls.

Also noted were quite a few Imperial Jezebel butterflies, as there are in many locations on the Peninsula at the moment.

After lunch in the picnic ground we headed to Endeavour Fern Gully. Some of us had been there before, but quite some years ago. Despite fears of an onslaught of leeches, we found the gully to be relatively dry.

The Reserve is owned by the National Trust, having been given to it in 1973. It was opened to the public in 1989 after construction of paths and a boardwalk, but these had fallen into disrepair until the last 10 or so years when volunteers repaired the tracks, did a great deal of weed removal (particularly of blackberries and willows) and extensive planting of the former farm paddocks up the hill to the Red Hill Road with indigenous plants.

The main feature of the Reserve is the fern gully itself, classified as EVC 721, Fern Swamp, which includes both Soft and Rough Tree Ferns, amongst many smaller ferns. The slopes support Damp Forest (EVC 029), dominated by tall Manna Gums. Other notable plants are Twining Silk Pod (*Parsonsia brownii*), rare on the Mornington Peninsula (it is present in Langwarrin Flora & Fauna Reserve), and Austral Mulberry (*Hedycarya angustifolia*). We didn't sight the former, but did see the latter (thanks to a very helpful sign).



There were a few less birds here than along the Rail Trail, the only new birds for the day being a pair of Wedge-tailed Eagles overhead, and White-naped Honeyeaters. More King Parrots, Crimson Rosellas, Yellow Robins, Scrubwrens and Spotted Pardalotes were among those noted. Other notable sightings included a number of interesting fungi and mosses.

Back at the newly built, but not yet fitted out, visitor centre we lingered in the cooling winter sunshine before heading off home, thankfully leech free.

Text & Photos: Lee Denis



Wildlife Encounters in Far North Queensland, Part 2– Roger Standen

Roger spoke to us back in 2017 about his previous trip to Cape York and his wildlife encounters then. This year he returned to Iron Range, where he had more fascinating encounters.

Reptiles: he met Australia's largest and smallest snakes. The largest is the Scrub Python (*Simalia kinghorni*), which grows to 5m and 25kg. Roger was watching a young and skinny one of only 2.5m long, probably less than 2 years old.

The smallest snake is the Brahminy Blindsnake (*Indotyphlops brahminus*), also known as the Flowerpot Blind Snake, because it has been unknowingly transported all around the world in the soil of ornamental plants, introduced from Africa or Asia. It has the size and appearance of an earthworm, and lives on the larvae, eggs & pupae of ants and termites. The species is parthenogenic and all known specimens have been female.

Roger watched an Eastern Argus Monitor (*Varanus panoptes panoptes*) digging in the sand on the side of a track, excavating an unknown form of food. It was so engrossed that it did not mind Roger watching.



Birds: as well as the much sought after endemic Eclectus Parrot and Palm Cockatoo, Roger watched Black Necked Storks feeding their adult sized but immature young on regurgitated food. They seemed large enough to feed themselves, but did not. Whistling kites fighting over a barramundi carcass were another experience. Scrub Turkeys: Roger observed them roosting in trees at night- most birds roost together, but the Scrub Turkeys maintained a distance of 2-3 metres apart all over the trees.

Invertebrates: the tropical Net-casting spiders were quite small, compared to our local ones which are much larger. The tropical ones were aerial hunters,

and ours more pedestrian.

The Orchard butterfly needs a citrus plant to lay its eggs on, and Roger watched it land on a Limeberry (*Micromelum minutum*). This plant has tiny fruit, unlike any citrus we are familiar with. Butterflies taste with their feet, so it walked over the plant to know that it was in the right place.

There were so many more encounters- spectacular moths, wasps, spiders, bees and more, all with information to bring them to life.

Text: Judy Smart, Photos: Roger Standen

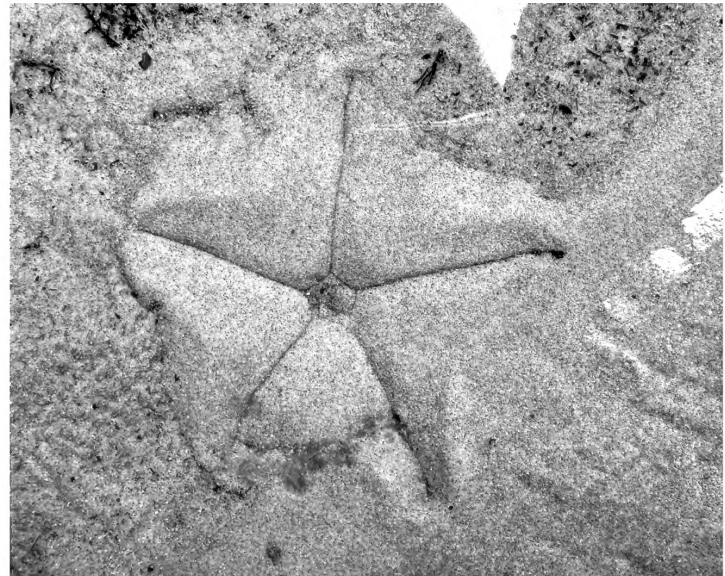
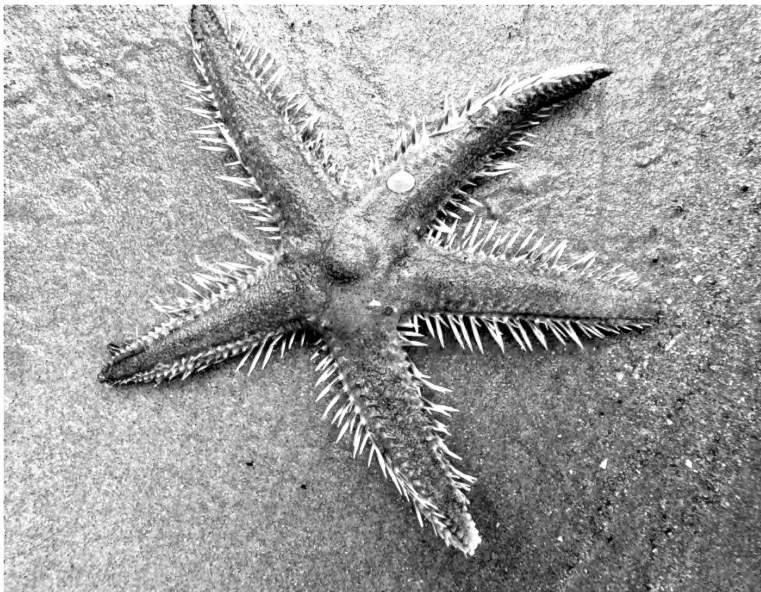


Photos this page– top– Scrub Python,
middle– Brahminy Blindsnake
Bottom— Orchard Butterfly

The Sphinx Moth is large with stunning markings, but so well camouflaged that it was only visible because it landed on concrete.



Marine: the Indo-Pacific Comb Star, or sand sifting starfish, or comb star is a rather fearsome looking sea star, with thorned arms, and quite large at up to 20cm. It is found throughout the Indo-Pacific region, and distinguishes itself by disappearing effortlessly into the sand.



Whistling Kites fighting over a Barramundi carcass— the 2 on the left kept fighting, while the third on the right watched passively. When the others flew off eventually the third did too.

Birding—Baldrys Crossing, July 1, 2024

Nine members assembled on a beautiful morning to walk the Baldrys Crossing Circuit in Greens Bush. We started out along the creek at the lower part of the circuit and it was running swiftly after the weekend rainfall. We considered ourselves lucky to be enjoying beautiful sunshine after a dismal weekend. Everything looked green and lush and the maiden hair fern and moss laden trees were stunning. A number of fungi were observed, the most interesting being 'White Brain', *Tremella fuciformis*, which is one of the jelly fungi. It consists of an irregular convoluted mass with translucent lobes and is only found on dead wood. Fungi are the nutrient recyclers of the forest and keep the woodlands healthy and are mostly overlooked in the important part they play in the ecosystem. The birds were generally quiet but we managed to see 21 species including White throated Treecreeper, Brown headed and White naped Honeyeaters. A very friendly Yellow Robin joined us for lunch back at the cars....a befitting end to a lovely day. Text & Photos: Bett Mitchell



Birding—Bulldog Creek Rd, August 5, 2024

A beautiful, sunny day greeted us for our August birding excursion .

We assembled at Bulldog Creek Road in Tuerong and were delighted to see a Bassian Thrush near the cars. Bulldog Creek Road winds through beautiful remnant stringy bark forest and the birds were numerous. We had fantastic close views of a pair of Crested Shrikes that were working their way along the bark looking for grubs. We observed 30 species for the morning including 5 species of honeyeater and a Fan-tailed Cuckoo calling. The common heath (*Epacris impressa*) was in flower and added a lovely touch of colour to the bush. A few Nodding Greenhoods (*Pterostylis nutans*) were also seen.

We went to Devilbend Reservoir for lunch to take advantage of the picnic tables and this was followed by a walk around the reservoir where we added to our tally of birds with numerous water birds.

A wonderful day was enjoyed in the sunshine.

Text & Photos: Bett Mitchell



And Also.....



Red Triangle Slug

Triboniophorus graeffei

Squiggly marks on tree trunks in Queensland and NSW can be the feeding patterns of Australia's largest native land slug, which can be up to 14cm. These strikingly-coloured, algae-eating terrestrial molluscs hide under bark and in moist leaf litter during the day and venture out to feed at night. The red triangle contains the breathing spore.

Photographed at Fraser Island, information from information board at Carnarvon Gorge.

Contact Us

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

CAV: A0010510T

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip on the following Saturday. Visitors always welcome.

We also go birding on the first Monday of the month.

Further information and current Program of Activities can be found at our website:

www.peninsulafieldnaturalists.org.au

We are also on Face book: **Peninsula Field Nats**

Email: penfieldnats@gmail.com

Secretary & temporary editor: Judy Smart

President: Heather Ducat

Treasurer: Linda Edwards

Annual subs due July

Adult \$35

Concession \$30

Family \$40

To pay direct to bank account: Bendigo Bank

BSB 633-108

Account 123350068

Please email secretary when paid